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AUTHOR	Gellert, Sandra
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ABSTRACT

This document is primarily a bibliography containing approximately 156 references on family day care. Most of the items listed are in English, but several titles are in Spanish. The document also provides a brief background on family day care, which includes an enumeration and explication of the advantages of family day care. Advantages include: (1) family day care providers accept children as young as 3 weeks of age; (2) providers are usually located in the child's neighborhood and have flexible hours; (3) children in family day care have a better chance to form close relationships with each other; (4) because family care is typically provided by one individual, the frequency and quality of parent-caregiver communication improves; and (5) family day care is better able to adapt to the individual needs. Disadvantages of family day care are also discussed. These include: (1) finding high quality family day care can be difficult; (2) family day care providers typically have less training in child development than child care center staff; and (3) zoning and deed restrictions are often problems for family day care providers. (JW)

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(202) 347-3300

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WHO SHOULD CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?

A Family Day Care Perspective

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Sandra Gellert, President
National Association for Family Day Care
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Updated by:

Sandra Gellert, Director
Family Day Care Advocacy Project
The Children's Foundation
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WHO SHOULD CARE FOR INFANTS AND TODDLERS?
A Family Day Care Perspective

Family day care is the most widely used form of out-of-home child care in this country. There are approximately 275,000 regulated family day care homes in the 50 states and the District of Columbia (CF, 1993). In addition, there are four to six times that many non-regulated homes. A 1988 Licensing Study done by The Children's Foundation also determined that 80-85% of all infant care was in family day care homes. In 1994 this figure is at least as high and may be higher.

> In the publication entitled "Crisis in Infant and Toddler Child Care" they said, "There was a 95% increase in mothers of infants in the workforce from 1970 to 1984, and the projection for the year 2000 is that 4 out of every 5 American infants under age one will have a mother in the workforce."

Resource and referral agencies (R&R's) indicate that more than 75% of their calls are for individuals looking for infant placements. Women are calling to find day care arrangement as soon as they learn they are pregnant. At a provider home near me, two of the parents planned their pregnancies to coincide with expected openings in that home so they would not have to look for alternative arrangements when the time came. Family day care agencies have long waiting lists for placements of infants, even when there is little or no waiting list for older children. [In 1994 infant care is still the least available and hardest to find.]

Because family day care is the most used form of day care for infants, I would like to spend some time discussing the advantages and disadvantages. First the advantages:

1. Family day care providers accept infants at 3 weeks of age where centers will generally not take them until they are at least 3 months of age, if at all. Since women often have very short maternity leaves or may be single parents where continued income is essential, this is paramount.

2. Family day care homes are generally located in the neighborhood where the parent lives, making it extremely convenient, an important factor for busy working parents.

3. Family day care providers generally have much more flexible hours than centers, trying to accommodate the varied needs of a working parent. They may be open at 6 AM and may not close until after 6 PM; or they may provide evening care, weekend care, or overnight care.

4. Family day care providers will usually accept 2 or more children from the same family thus providing continuity for the parent and the infant. Family separation can cause additional stress to the parent and children.

5. Continuity of the caregiver: In a family day care setting the parent knows the individual caring for their child all day and knows that it is the same person. In caring for infants, this is particularly important for the security of the infant and the bonding of the child to the parent and caregiver. This is also particularly important because they are totally dependent upon the caregiver.

6. In family day care there can be conformity of care from infancy through school age. Many family day care providers keep an infant from a few weeks of age until the child is in school. This is again a benefit to the stability of the environment of the child and the family.

7. Children in family day care homes learn that this is their "home away from home," and the caregiver becomes a friend, someone who can be counted on to help that child -- extended family. It is a bond that stays with the child for many years.

8. Family day care offers a home-like setting, similar to the one the child would be in if her/his Mom didn't have to go out to work. This again is very important for the nurturing and development of infants and toddlers. Infants and toddlers are more vulnerable to adversity and less able to cope with discomfort and stress. Providing an environment for day care as much like their own home as possible is essential.

9. Also, because a family day care home usually has a multi-age grouping of children from infants to school age, the day care children become like siblings and interact as such. Infants and toddlers have the opportunity for an extended family environment with older brothers and sisters. Children learn so much from one another.

10. Experts such as child developments specialists agree that infants need to be cared for in small group settings. The emphasis for their normal growth and development is nurturing, love, and TLC. A family day care home can provide this more readily than a day care center.

11. Because an infant in a family day care home has only one caregiver, it is easier for the parent to keep daily direct communications about the growth and development of

the infant. Communication is essential to a positive parent/provider partnership since the changes in infants and toddlers happen so quickly and frequently. In a day care center due to staff changes, an infant or toddler may have three or more caregivers during one day. Centers generally have three different shifts of staff, making it harder for the parent to really develop a strong partnership with the child's caregiver.

12. A family day care home is an excellent learning environment. Children learn more in the first six years of their life than in all the remainder. They are like sponges, taking in everything that comes in contact with them. Infants and toddlers need to have an opportunity to learn and grow in surroundings with developmentally appropriate activities. A family day care home is a wonderful place to do just that.

13. Family day care provides greater individuality of care. This enhances the child's feeling of self-worth. The care is personalized. There is trust relationship between the infant and the provider. The family child care provider feels almost as close to the day care child as she/he does to her/his own.

14. A home is a less threatening place for an infant or toddler. It feels warm and cozy, not impersonal like a facility or institution. It is a more nurturing and understanding environment for a mildly ill child, as well. No one is more important than "Mom" to a sick child, followed next by the family day care provider. A mildly ill child will not feel quite so bad about not being with Mommy if they are with their caring provider.

15. Family day care is generally cheaper than center-based care for infants and toddlers. Parents pay $100 to $250 per week for quality infant care in a center, and even at this price the center may not be break even. In contrast, care in a family day care home will generally be $75 to $200 a week depending upon the geographic location. The overhead costs of caring for infants and toddlers in a center force the fees to skyrocket; things like child-staff ratios, staff salaries & benefits, insurance, building rental and maintenance, equipment, etc. Family day care providers, on the other hand, have much lower overhead costs and have the added advantage of tax write-offs on a portion of the cost of household expenses: rent, gas, electric, oil, water, food as well as general business expenses.

16. The Child and Adult Care Food Program is another asset for the family day care provider and children in care. Regulated family child care providers receive reimbursement from USDA for nutritious meals & snacks served and also receive training and monitoring. For infants and toddlers this means better quality care, a more nutritious diet, and the opportunity to learn good eating habits.

Unfortunately, there are still some <u>disadvantages</u>:

1. Finding quality family day care for infants and toddlers is still a difficult task. There are several reasons for that: family day care is a less public form of child care and therefore harder to find; the number of infants and/or toddlers one provider can care for is low; providers often don't want to care for infants and toddlers because of the additional work; waiting lists in subsidized programs are long; and the number of mothers looking for infant care continues to rise as more mothers enter the workforce.

2. The physical learning environment may not offer as much variety as a day care center. Providers often lack education in how to create a healthy and safe child-centered environment. Providers deserve and need job-specific educational opportunities just as much as others in the early childhood field. Parents have a right to the best quality care for their child.

3. Family day care providers have less (and frequently no) training in infant and toddler development. As documented in the <u>1993 Family Day Care Licensing Study</u> (CF, 93), eleven states still have no training requirement for family child care providers, and many others only require 2-6 hours, usually orientation, basic first aid, or infant/child CPR. No states require additional training specific to the care of infants and toddlers in their family day care homes (CF, 93).

4. High child-staff ratios are still a problem. The recommended ratio is 1:2 or 1:3 when caring for children under the age of two. Thirty-two states require that ratio in their family day care regulations. However, the remainder of the states are higher and some still have have very poor and unsafe ratios [GA, LA, NC, SC - 1:6 and ID - 1:12] (CF, 93).

5. The turnover rate in family day care is still a major problem. Because of isolation, low wages, lack of training and support, the turnover rate may still be as high as 50% per year. Unfortunately, the rate in

centers is no better. Studies have shown that the retention rate for family day care providers can be enhanced by offering training and peer support groups. Those providers who get involved with a local, state or national family day care association and who take advantage of training opportunities, find family day care a much more rewarding career, provide better quality care, and stay in the profession much longer (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos & Shinn, 94).

6. Zoning and deed restriction problems still plague the family day care profession. Many providers stay unregulated or underground for fear of being identified and shut down by their local city or township for a zoning violation or their condominium association. In many states, operating a family day care business in your home is still against local residential zoning codes. In about 1/4 of the states, the state legislatures have enacted legislation which classifies family day care as an "accepted use of residential property" and therefore not subject to local zoning restrictions. State law supersedes local law. Only MD has addressed the issue of deed restrictions.

The disadvantages can be rectified!

It is because of the disadvantages that The Children's Foundation wrote and published Better Baby Care: A Book for Family Day Care Providers in 1986 [updated and revised, 1994; also available in Spanish]. Helping parents and providers be more qualified to care for infants and toddlers was of primary concern to them and still is today. In 1988, they published Better Baby Care: A Training Course for Family Day Care Providers, a step--by-step curriculum to accompany the book.

I can tell you from first-hand experience as a trainer, having used this training curriculum, it is an excellent tool and is very well received by participants and trainers alike. I say "participants" rather than family day care providers because, although the primary focus is for training family day care providers, we found that day care centers were just as interested in having their infant room staff participate. Quality infant/toddler training is so hard to find that center staff as well as family day care providers wanted to take the training. Not only that, but we continually had a waiting list.

Better Baby Care is also useful for nannies and teen parents. The Spanish edition, Mejor Cuidado Infantil, has been used successfully when recruiting and training Spanish-speaking family day care providers (CF, 93).

Training is an essential component in providing quality infant and toddler care in family day care. Our experience indicates that providers are willing to pay for their training if opportunities are available for them.

Another of the disadvantages of family day care, as I stated previously, is locating a quality home. This was one of the factors instrumental in the development of the Family Day Care Accreditation Program of the National Association for Family Day Care (NAFDC). Family day care has always had an image problem. However, quality family day care has an even bigger one.

NAFDC, at the urging of its members, and with their input, developed the National Family Day Care Accreditation Program. The Accreditation's Assessment Profile, consisting of more than 270 questions in seven areas of competency, was developed for NAFDC by Drs. Annette Sibley and Martha Abbott-Shim, working directly with family day care providers from across the country. The Accreditation covers indoor safety, health, nutrition, interacting, indoor and outdoor play environments, and professional responsibility. It examines the provider and her/his home. Insurance companies and parents have already indicated the benefits that this will provide in finding and enhancing quality family day care, especially for infants and toddlers.

Family day care associations are on the increase everywhere. The growth of associations in the last ten years has been tremendous. The Children's Foundation has been publishing the National Directory of Family Child Care Associations and Support Groups for more than ten years and the latest edition has approximately 700 local, state, regional and national groups listed (CF, 94).

Associations to help alleviate the isolationism that providers feel through peer support, provide training opportunities, and a forum for peer action and advocacy. All these things are essential to the improvement of quality infant-toddler care in family day care setting. Providers who are members of associations are more apt to stay in the field longer. Helping to cut down the turnover rate surely provides more stability and continuity in the lives of the infants and toddlers in care, and providers feel good about themselves and their profession.

Associations are also reaching out to the non-regulated providers by showing them the benefits of being part of the regulated system: tax advantages, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and job-specific training and resources. This important role of the association helps to make the family day care provider more readily visible for parents and helps to improve the quality of care to children in the community.

Family day care is world wide. It is one of the oldest professions in the world. It can be found in France, Denmark,

Israel, Norway, England, Australia, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, New Zealand, Canada, Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil---to name but a few. Each country may have its own name for it, such as "childminders" in England, but it is a recognized world wide part of the child care and early childhood profession. Several international family day care conferences have been held. For infants and toddlers, it is going to continue to be the most widely used for of out-of-home child care.

In conclusion -

What is important for infants and toddlers from a family day care prospective is what we do to make it higher in quality and more readily identifiable, and more readily available for parents. Today I have provided some insight into areas that where disadvantages can be overcome: through education of the public and unregulated providers, by providing more job-specific educational opportunities, through association development and participation, accreditation, and better regulatory standards. Who should care for infants and toddlers? I believe the answer to that question is family child care providers. It was the overwhelming choice of parents and child development specialists in 1988 where this paper was first presented, and it is still their choice in 1994.

I would like to quote to you from a letter written a parent in Pennsylvania in 1988 which was in response to a local zoning issue for her child's family day care provider.

> As mothers today are forced into the workplace out of necessity--not out of choice--finding quality day care that provides a loving atmosphere is not an easy task. As a mother that was confronted with the reality of leaving my six-month old infant in someone else's care, I found that the best alternative was a family day care home. The home environment provides a stable, loving atmosphere versus a "cold" center facility which has frequent staff turnovers. To find a state licensed day care home is not easy. Long waiting lists are frequently encountered. I have been very fortunate to find a provider that gives my child individualized loving attention in a home environment.
>
> I wish for the day that I could stay home and have to endure "screaming, crying children" all day. We are not talking about providing care for juvenile delinquents --these children are between the ages of 6 weeks and 4 years old. I hardly believe that listening to the cries and laughter of these children could be so terrible that one could not endure it!

Family day care offers an environment which fosters physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development as well as providing

an opportunity to form affectionate attachments with children and caregiver. It provides the opportunity to appreciate and care for each infant and toddler as an individual. That child begins to learn that she/he is a lovable, capable, worthwhile human being. As it is written in of the National Association for Family Day Care Code of Excellence, a quality family day care provider:

Provides a safe and healthy environment for children;

Responds to the need to offer age appropriate activities based on a knowledge of child development;

Offers nutritious meals in a positive, relaxed social atmosphere;

Varies play and encourages exploration in both outdoor and indoor space;

Interacts with children in a positive manner that is responsive to individual needs, enhances children's self-confidence and facilitates learning;

Develops the family day care business by establishing policies and maintaining records and sharing information with parents;

Experiences professional growth opportunities through participation in seminars, conferences, support groups and professional associations; and

Respects and follows state and local family day care regulations.

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We have attempted to be inclusive, yet timely, recognizing the growth and change in the profession. Although this bibliography contains more than 130 listings, we recognize that it is not complete. We view this as the "beginning" and know that some important publications or resources may have been omitted.

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Family Day Care Advocacy Project
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